

Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten

1927 – 1988

Other Names:

- Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten for Emergency Care
- Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten
- Forest Hill Holiday Home
- Free Kindergarten Holiday Home

Details

The Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten opened in 1960. It provided short-term residential care for up to 20 children, and day care for smaller groups of children, aged 2 – 6 years during times of family stress or breakdown. From 1927, there was a “holiday home” on the site, where children from inner city kindergartens came for short holidays of a couple of weeks to improve their health. During the epidemic of 1937-38, the Home accommodated children convalescing from polio. The Forest Hill Kindergarten’s residential program ceased in 1988.

Affiliated with the Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria, Forest Hill was maintained by the Graduates’ Association of the Kindergarten Training College in Melbourne. The Association purchased the property in Forest Hill in 1926, and established a ‘holiday home’ for children in need. A newspaper article from 1936 described the origins of the holiday home. It stated that the director of a kindergarten in Melbourne’s poorer inner suburbs, “distressed at the obvious effect of under nourishment on some of the children”, decided to take 2 or 3 children on a short country holiday at her own expense. She was delighted with the results, seeing that the children had gained weight and their health had improved. This experiment aroused the interest of past students of the Free Kindergarten Union’s training college, and they decided to raise funds to establish a holiday home where children from inner city kindergartens could go for short periods. By the end of 1926, the graduates were able to buy a 14 acre property on Canterbury Road in Forest Hill, and in 1927, the first 10 children from Brunswick Kindergarten were the first to come to the new holiday home (The *Argus*, 14 December 1936).

An article from 1928 states that the Kindergarten Holiday Home was established “for the purpose of enabling sickly and under-nourished children of the industrial areas to enjoy the benefits of a country holiday which they would otherwise never know, and to obtain plenty of good food, rest, fresh air and suitable occupations under trained supervision”. At that time, there was accommodation for 10 children at a time, and the Home hoped to expand to 15 places. Children were chosen by the medical officer of the Free Kindergarten Union, Dr Vera Scantlebury (Fern Tree Gully News, 8 September 1928).

In 1936, construction was underway for a new building to replace the original cottage. The new holiday home was planned on “domestic rather than institutional lines” and would accommodate 20 children. The design aimed to maximise sunshine for people in the home. It included a self-contained suite for kindergarten staff with 3 bedrooms (Herald, 4 November 1936). The new building was officially opened in June 1937.

In 1946, it was reported that Forest Hill Holiday Home had accommodated 252 children during the past year. Its “sister” holiday home, Ware, in Ringwood East (later called Warrawong), opened in 1937 and hosted 139 children in 1948 (Argus, 22 November 1946). The committee that ran the Home often appealed to the community for donations. In 1950, it put a call out to Victorian farmers in the *Weekly Times* for a cow – they had recently lost their milking cow and were finding it very expensive buying milk for the children (Weekly Times, 10 May 1950).

In 1960, in response to changing needs in the community, it became known as the Forest Hill Emergency Kindergarten, and began providing short-term residential care for groups of up to twenty children of pre-school age (2 – 6 years) during times of family stress or breakdown. The Kindergarten also accepted a small group of children for day care when similar emergencies arose. The Kindergarten was located at 124 Lake Road, Forest Hill, within the large parcel of land that had been purchased in 1926.

Although registered with the Hospital and Charities Commission, the Forest Hill Emergency Kindergarten was not an approved children's home. The Kindergarten's Committee discussed applying for such approval however it elected to maintain independent control of intake policy and control the children's age range and length of time accommodated. An undated Procedure Manual in the records at University of Melbourne Archives states that children aged from 2 up to 6 were admitted for emergency accommodation for a period up to 3 weeks.

By around 1969 the Kindergarten had an annual intake of 230 children. The Director's report for 1971 stated that the Kindergarten had taken in 210 children for residential care that year. It stated that many of the children who stayed at Forest Hill temporarily were from stable families, but that the families sometimes needed emergency support. The report gave the example of a family where the mother was receiving psychiatric treatment and the father was under strain caring for the children.

The work of the Kindergarten was praised by Mr John Richardson in Victoria's Legislative Assembly on 28 April 1976:

The Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten for Emergency Care provides a unique service for, regrettably, too few children. The service is for children who are in impossible domestic situations. An example would be the case of a father being in gaol and the mother being left at home in difficult circumstances with a number of children. She could be under severe mental strain and on the verge of a nervous breakdown; or it could be worse. We have examples of the mother in fact cracking and starting to mistreat the children. There could be an impossible domestic situation in which the mother and father attacked each other in front of the children. The residential kindergarten provides a refuge and emergency care so that the children can be removed from that impossible environment and something done to restore the domestic situation. Although there are areas in which success has not been achieved, during the many years that the institution has been established its record has been sound and it has achieved much success.

From around 1983, following the regionalisation of emergency residential care by Community Services Victoria and a move away from institutional care, emergency care placements to Forest Hill Kindergarten declined. Documents at University of Melbourne Archives indicate that the Victorian government conducted a review of the service in 1987. The Kindergarten provided the government with a lengthy report about its operations and requesting future support for its work. At that time, it was providing overnight care as well as a kindergarten service. Some families used the Kindergarten for "Day Only" admissions, that ran from 7am to 7pm. In order to keep providing 24 hour care, the report recommended that Forest Hill discontinue these day only admissions.

Evidently, Community Services Victoria planned to stop placing children at Forest Hill, and instead put them in emergency foster care placements. The Kindergarten's response was that foster care was not an alternative to the work done at Forest Hill. "If you are missing your own mother, then being in someone else's family – where other children have their mother – just highlights the loss. Families and mothers are NOT INTERCHANGEABLE". They argued that Forest Hill offered children:

a neutral situation where other children share the problem, and thus are a source of comfort and interest ... and where professional staff do not try to fill the parents' role, has strong advantages. Here children are all in the same relationship to the adult giving care and support ...

In a foster family situation, it is necessary for a new and temporary member to fit in with the group's needs, and "behave" in the new situation. These would be reasonable expectations from someone with family responsibilities. So what do you do with your pent-up anxiety or deep-seated feelings of hostility? At Forest Hill, children are offered opportunities to release such feelings, in ways which do not harm themselves or others. Space, equipment, materials – and guidance from professional staff – help with this. Time can be given to such matters in a situation where children are the priority; and it is more likely that children will risk expressing feelings and problems in a situation which is "neutral ground" for them.

There are recurring family crises. Emergency care is needed several times during the year. It is highly unlikely that the same foster family will be available at short notice every time.

Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten offers continuity of both setting and personnel – and children's problem of leaving home is offset to some extent by the thought of "having another little holiday at Forest Hill" or "going to see Auntie C. again" (Review of the Emergency Care and Kindergarten Service at Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten and Proposals for Future Work, Forest Hill Review Committee, 1987).

Despite this advocacy, in 1988 the residential program was discontinued and a new day care kindergarten program commenced at Forest Hill. Following further funding difficulties all programs at Forest Hill began to close from June 1990 and the property was sold in 1991.

Part of the sale proceeds was used to establish the Forest Hill Early Childhood Foundation in 1995. In 2005, it became known as the Foundation of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies, and it distributes funds to the Early Childhood Development field for projects which focus on the well-being, education and care of young children and families.

Gallery



The Kindergarten Holiday Home, Forest Hill, Vic.

Description: This is one of six images from the collection of the State Library of Victoria showing the Forest Hill Kindergarten Holiday Home. It would appear to show the new building, constructed in 1936 and officially opened in 1937.



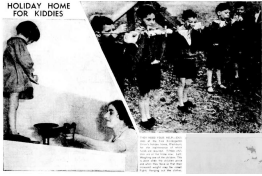
Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten - Nursery, c.1938

Description: This is a copy of a photograph from the collection of the Whitehorse Historical Society, showing the nursery at Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten.



The original holiday home

Description: This is a copy of a photograph that appears on p.17 of a publication, "Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten 1926-1976". It shows the building that was on the site before it was replaced in 1936.



Holiday Home for Kiddies

Description: This is a copy of an illustrated newspaper article from 1937 about the Free Kindergarten Union's holiday home in Forest Hill. The Melbourne *Herald* published two photographs, one of a child being weighed and another of children hanging out washing. The caption reads: THEY NEED YOUR HELP. Children at the Free Kindergarten Union's holiday home, Blackburn, for the maintenance of which funds are required. Fifteen children are at the home now. Left: weighing one of the children. This is done when the children arrive and when they leave so that their increased weight may be noted. Right: Hanging out the clothes.

More info

Related Entries

Run by

- [Melbourne Kindergarten Teachers College, Graduates Association \(1922 - 2005\)](#)

Resources

- Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten, *Forest Hill Residential Kindergarten, 1926-1976: A History, from Holiday Home to Emergency Care*, 1976
- [Forest Hill \(Residential\) Kindergarten \(1927-88\)](#), Finding Records, No date. *Relevance:* See the 'List of records held by the department' section for information about records relating to Forest Hill Emergency Kindergarten
- [Holiday home for kiddies](#), Pix, 24 February 1945
- [Forest Hill Holiday Home](#), The Argus, 22 November 1946

Records

For more information and to access your records, follow the links below:

Records

- [Records of the Institute of Early Childhood Development Graduates Association \(1937 - 2003\)](#)
 - [Voluntary Children's Homes Files \(1921 - 1989\)](#)
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